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SUBJECT: AMB. HILL'S INTRODUCTORY CALL ON IRAQI VP ABDEL
MAHDI

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: During a friendly introductory meeting, Vice President Adel Abdel Mahdi welcomed the Ambassador's emphasis on successful parliamentary elections and progress on hydrocarbons legislation as top items on Iraq's national agenda. The Vice President encouraged the Ambassador to use TV and other media to reach out directly to the Iraqi public, observing that he would need to strike a careful balance in meeting with leaders of Iraq's different ethnic and religious communities. Hearing that the Ambassador would soon be visiting the UN Secretariat in New York, the Vice President asked for U.S. help in getting Iraq out of Chapter VII status. End summary.

Elections and Democratic Institutions

12. (C) In a cordial 45-minute introductory call on Iraqi Vice President Adel Abdel Mahdi (a Shi'a affiliated with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq), the Ambassador said he saw the upcoming parliamentary elections (expected in late 2009 or early 2010) as the next major landmark in Iraq's democratic development, and stressed the USG would work hard to support their success. The Ambassador observed that elections were nonetheless part of a broader process. After all, it is possible to have elections without real democracy, but impossible to have real democracy without elections, the Ambassador noted. Vice President Abdel Mahdi agreed: "Elections are meaningless in the absence of strong democratic institutions," he said. Institution building was a major need for Iraq, the Vice President continued, in a country that had endured more than 40 years of dictatorship.

Hydrocarbons

13. (C) The Ambassador also cited hydrocarbons legislation as an area in which the USG hoped to see progress in the coming year. The Vice President welcomed U.S. engagement on the issue, encouraging the Ambassador to meet soon with Thamer Ghadban, "the father of hydrocarbons legislation" - a former oil minister and now a consultant to both Prime Minister Maliki and the Iraqi Presidency Council.

Public Diplomacy

14. (C) The Ambassador sought the Vice President's advice on the best ways he could reach out directly to the Iraqi people. Abdel Mahdi observed that communicating with the Iraqi public was "an art, not a science," and cautioned that no one had yet perfected this art in Iraq. Nonetheless, he encouraged the Ambassador to make himself available to the media and not hesitate to go on TV for "spontaneous" conversations. Adding a note of caution, the Vice President

advised the Ambassador to draw on his experience in the Balkans and seek a judicious balance of interactions with members and leaders of each of Iraq's various ethnic and sectarian communities: "If you see a Kurd, you should also see an Arab and a Turkoman... If you see a Shi'a, you should also see a Sunni..."

Iraq's UN Agenda

15. (C) The Ambassador told the Vice President he would soon return to the U.S. for consultations. He planned to stop in New York and lunch with UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon. Fareed Yaseen, a senior advisor to the Vice President, noted that Iraq was trying to get a number of qualified Iraqis appointed to various positions in the UN Secretariat and asked the Ambassador to "put in a good word for Iraq" with the UNSYG. The Vice President also asked for U.S. support in helping Iraq resolve its Chapter VII status at the UN. The Ambassador confirmed U.S. support for a settlement favorable to Iraq.
HILL